

News Media Communications Guidelines

The Fair Political Practices Commission was created by the Political Reform Act of 1974, a groundbreaking law passed by California voters as Proposition 9. A central purpose of the Act is to provide the voters and public with meaningful disclosure of state and local campaign contributions and expenditures, state lobbying activity, and the economic interests of state and local candidates and designated public officials. Following the letter and spirit of the Act, the Commission's general news media communications guidelines are as follows:

- The Commission's policies and procedures for providing public information to the media – and the general public – must uphold and further the purposes of the Political Reform Act.
- Public records are provided by the Commission in accordance with the Political Reform Act, the California Public Records Act and any other applicable authority or regulation. For more details, please refer to the Commission's web page entitled, "Accessing Public Records of the Fair Political Practices Commission."
- Many thousands of public documents are freely available on the Commission's website. All Commission agenda, including enforcement cases and supporting exhibits, are posted on the website 10 days in advance of each monthly Commission meeting. Other documents on the FPPC website include past Commission agenda, staff memoranda, fact sheets, manuals, form instructions, litigation reports, meeting minutes, regulations, notices of public interested persons' meetings, and the current Political Reform Act. Campaign disclosure reports and lobbying reports are posted on the California Secretary of State's website. Local campaign disclosure reports are found at local elections' and clerks' offices and may be posted on local government websites. Public officials' Statements of Economic Interests are not on line, but they are public documents and copies may be requested by calling or visiting the Commission or appropriate local or state filing officer or filing official. The Act specifies a copying fee of up to 10 cents per page.
- The Commission maintains a dedicated media communications telephone number (916-322-7761), a media section on the Commission's website, and an e-mail subscription service for Commission news releases, news advisories, agendas, interested persons' notices, the FPPC *Bulletin* and other public information. Other staff receiving media calls should refer those callers to the media line or forward the caller to communications staff or executive staff.
- The Commission's goals are accuracy and promptness when responding to media inquiries. When preparing a response, Commission communications staff routinely consults with senior staff, the Executive Director and/or the

Commission Chair. No news advisory or news release is issued without the approval of the Commission Chair or his or her designee. Commission staff recognizes that reporters and other media representatives face deadlines, although at times the number and complexity of pending media requests, or the Commission's limited resources, may lead to unavoidable delays.

- Commission communications staff is as helpful as possible by explaining the general requirements of the Political Reform Act and Commission rules, and by directing reporters and the general public to specific sections of law, regulations, manuals, forms, fact sheets, filings, and other public information and resources. The Commission fully appreciates and recognizes the vital role of the news media in our democratic system. But Commission staff cannot comment or speculate on a specific situation, occurrence, or disclosure document that hasn't been formally and publicly addressed by the Commission under the authority of the Act. To do otherwise would short circuit the procedures and due processes of the Act and require staff to speculate as to what the Commission or other authority may do in any future formal proceeding. When an inquiry appears to fall outside the scope of the Act or the Commission's jurisdiction, staff will attempt to refer the caller to the proper agency or resource.
- The FPPC does not allow access to any pending enforcement cases until the case is closed, an accusation is issued, a civil complaint is filed, or a settlement is presented to the Commission. As such, Commission communications staff will not confirm or deny receipt of a complaint or the existence of an open investigation. This respects the due process protections of the Act as well as the confidentiality of complainants, witnesses and those under investigation. For closed cases, Commission regulation 18362(a) provides that access to investigative files, including complaints and other enforcement information, shall be granted in accordance with the requirements of the Public Records Act. Any requests for access to closed enforcement cases must describe the documents sought. Frequently, the closure letter in a closed investigation includes a summary of the case and the final disposition.
- Upon request and as schedules permit, communications staff may arrange telephone or in-person interviews with the Commission Chair or other staff for discussion of significant issues, consistent with the caveats on open investigations discussed above.